

THE WORD OF LIFE

A BIBLE STUDY MAGAZINE



FALL 2005

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"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3)



SAINT MARK'S ORTHODOX FELLOWSHIP

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He sighed, and said to him,
"Ephphatha", "Be opened"



"Fr. Lev Gillet"

"Then they brought to Him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, and they begged Him to put His hand on him. And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue. Then, looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." (Mark 7: 32-34)

The word in Aramaic language, which our Lord Jesus Christ uttered to the sick man from Decapolis, is the same one that He shall say to me if I'm willing and asking Him. As a deaf person, my closed ears are no longer able to hear the word of God, the callings of Divine grace or the sweet powerful supplications; all those sweet melodies which the Holy Spirit sings inside me. Even when I pray, my prayers usually are self-talks to my self, whereas I must pay more attention to listen. And, I am no longer able to hear what others say. While some talks of others whom I consider sinners (atheists, heretics or criminals...) come from above and remind us with God; still I don't look beyond those strange and enmity words to see the better element that exists in every human-being. Because I am selfish, argumentative and negative, I don't realize behind those strange and hostile talks that goodness existing in every human being, as I find it in those words of love and sincerity. "Ephphatha"! O lord open up my ears.

I come to the Savior, as a mute or a semi-mute. My hindered tongue is unable to address God with the fiery words coming out from a loving heart. My prayers are still merely cold mumbles. And, I don't know yet this language which overcomes all differences, and soars above them, to convey to every human speaker only whatever is from God, to urge for a godly response. I don't know yet how to communicate, or to enter into an exchange of very deep and true communication, because my uttered words, do not express yet that Him who is the Incarnate Word. Hence, what account will I be required to give for those miserable words that I utter? "Ephphatha"! O Lord, open up my mouth.

The narrative of St. Mark explains precisely the circumstances in which Jesus restored that sick and handicapped man, **"He took him**



aside from the multitude, and put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue.” (Mark 7:32-33). This internal cordial communication is necessary to give His word “Ephphatha”. Accordingly, He must touch my ears and my tongue.

Here I am O Lord submitting my self to the purifying and opener touch of yours. All of my personality as a whole is closed and is begging you to keep it open. Here I am opening my heart for you, so please open it for Yourself and for all human beings, “Ephphatha”. Please grant my feebleness and my lowliness this wonderful liberating word to work in me at all times and forever.

Translated



IN THIS ISSUE

The English Section:

The first article, “**Be Transformed**”, by *Fr. Matta El-Meskeen* is a call for transformation based on the commandments of our Lord in the New Testament. In this fourth and final part of the article, the author presents the factors that keep us in the power of the effective living Word.

The second article is “The Heavenly Banquet and The Table of the Messiah in the NT”, by *Rodolph Yanney, MD*. In this part, the writer presents the Lord’s teachings on the Eucharist, in the union of the bridegroom and the bride.

The third article, “**The Bible And Ancient Tradition**” addresses the features that may be considered common among the Biblical commentaries of the early Fathers of the Eastern Church, and the ancient writings.

The fourth article is, “**The Millennium In The Bible**”. The word “Millennium” has been mentioned only in Chapter 20 of the Book of Revelation. How can we understand the word “**Millennium**” in accordance with the biblical text of this chapter? That is what the fourth article explains.



The Arabic Section:

The first article is, "**The Bible And The Orthodox Spirituality**", by *Noshi Abd-El-Shaheed, M.D.* The article explains the efficacy of using the Bible in the Liturgical prayers of the Orthodox Church, and its value in keeping the high level of the Orthodox spirituality through ages.

The second article is, "**St. Cyril of Alexandria A Biblical Interpreter**", by *George Awad, Ph.D.* In this article the writer studies the values and the characters of St. Cyril Biblical writings.

The Third article is, "**St Paul The last Disciple**", by *Gamil N. Soliman, Ph.D.* This study from the Book of Acts presents the life of St. Paul the Apostle and the Disciple of Christ.

The fourth and last Arabic article, by *Fouad N. Youssef* continues the study in the Coptic Lectionary. In this issue we start studying, "The Second Season of the Coptic Liturgical Year." The fourth curriculum in this season offers the readings of 'The Great Lent'. This study is very important and vital to the Coptic Church's preachers and teachers of the word.

We thank every person who offered help in publishing and distributing the magazine, asking the Lord to reward them with His heavenly blessings. Also, we ask for your continued prayers for the success of this work serving the "Word of Life."

REMINDER

We remind all members to remit their subscription for the Fourth Volume and/or renew their subscription for the Fifth Volume of the Word of Life Magazine





A Message To Those Who Look Forward To A Better Life

Be Transformed

Part IV

By Father Matta el Meskeen

The Means to comprehend the Word of God producing the change

This is a continuation to the article presented in the last issues in which Father Matta talked about God's commandments in the Bible (N.T.) emphasizing and firmly inciting us to change.

WE ARE PUZZLED when without explanation or elucidation we first read these commandments of few words and face their heavy demands: "Be transformed," "put off the old man," "put on the new man," "put to death your members which are on the earth."

Yet when we review the examples of those who were able to carry out these commandments and have fulfilled all these demands we find them not merely thousands, but millions over the centuries in every generation up till the present. Then when we study these examples that actually succeeded in applying the gospel, gaining change and fulfillment in following the new life till the end we find in humanity examples of different types and of every stature. There were those who were the worst examples of human conduct, those who were the weakest whether in their will, intellectual or physical status, proving that the secret to success is not based on specific human elements or unique personal capabilities.

Therefore the secret exists for sure within the commandment itself that is in the effective living Divine word of the gospel containing the actual power of our salvation at all levels. The soul has only to accept this salvation and respond to its demands through the will and effort.

The Way to adhere to the Power of the Effective Living Word

There exist two main factors:

First: Continual concentration on the commandment,

Second: Placing all hope on the grace of God that supports the word.

The first factor: The continuous concentration on the commandment,

i.e. the word of God in the gospel:

Here, reading needs to be done with lots of deep meditation, repeatedly, patiently, with an open submissive mind, and vigilance.



These specifications are of extreme importance for reading to form a mystical connection with the power of the commandment and produce its fruit.

If we would remember Christ's description of the Word of God's action entering into man's heart, then we would pay greater heed to the factors Christ mentioned for the word to attain its effectiveness. Christ described the word of God as a seed God sows in man's heart. God's role ends entirely at this point like that of the planter who has planted seeds in the earth. Afterwards it is man's turn to start preserving the seed in his heart for the devil not to seize it through desires of conceit and evil thoughts. Then it is also man's role to start the act of developing the word if his heart is good soil, i.e. is good for the growth of God's guidance and commandments as the new fertile soil that responds to a planter's efforts.

Christ's description shows the importance of man's role in accepting the word of life and holding on to it, keeping it precious within his heart, with vigilance till the word changes into action and conduct.

Following are a few verses that prove the mystery of focusing on the gospel's word to attain the full transformation required within the depth of human nature:

1 – "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3: 14, 15).

Note the amount of emphasis St Paul the Apostle places on the importance of continuing in what you have learned. Because it is according to the amount of man's steadfastness to the truth, he has learnt in contemplation and repetition day and night, that he will be transformed to put into practice and live through the power of God. Note also Paul the Apostle's emphasis on the ability of religious books that have the power and rule over human nature—being the word of God, living and effective in creation—to change, discipline and rule man until he attains salvation.

2 – "Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (Jam 1: 21).

James the Apostle firmly warns us here that the door opened to us and prepared for our entrance to salvation is the 'word', commanding us to receive it with meekness, i.e. without haughtiness, objection and disputation. Meekness is fundamental for the word of God to enter our



hearts and become totally implanted in our nature as the seed that becomes implanted in good soil.

We must not ignore the importance of the Apostle James' description of the word being 'implanted'. Here lies a wonderful act of fusion between the Divine word and our nature that James the Apostle reveals.

3 – “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (Jam 1: 22).

St James the Apostle here links the word with immediate works revealing and at the same time emphasizing the aim of the word and its power over conduct. The word is prepared to work on the will and conduct with the utmost speed and power if we open the door to it. The word of God is able at the same time to move mountains of ice and dirt from our consciences even from the innermost wits of our bones, and the deepest intersections of our souls unattainable by any therapy or physician. The word of God can awaken the new will that is asleep and inflame the conscience with courage, sanctity and purity, untying the shackles of the soul and body from the worst uncontrollable habits. All of which is subject to the human consciousness immediate acceptance to the word of God, giving it dominion over the throne of the heart with faithfulness, truthfulness and certainty in an unwavering faith and stubborn mind that strongly refuses doubt.

The Apostle James then warns us from the deception in which we fall intentionally when we hear the word with the power of the word beginning to knock at the door of the conscience but we postpone the response and avoid its immediate implementation. The word consequently stops to act and only remains reserved in the mind, deceiving us with its existence and perhaps deceiving others too.

4 – “He who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing” (Jam 1:25).

The Apostle James once again points to the gospel as the perfect law, which if man obeys will attain the end, the goal and perfection. He also named it the law of liberty, as the power of the word and commandment are able to free man from the shackles of all forms of bondage: the fear of death, weakness due to sinning, servility to persons due to a feeling of deficiency or to desires of material gain or worldly glory.

Here the Apostle James emphasizes that the gospel is the law of liberty that is able, through the hidden power within it, to liberate whoever is under the bondage of anything.



Yet James the Apostle sets a main stipulation that it is not as soon as man 'reads' or gets to know this law that he becomes perfect or free but he must be inwardly tied to that law, having described it as 'steadfastness'. When man follows steadfastly that which has been revealed to him of the law, he will then reach the perfection and liberty that is offered to every one who steadfastly adheres to it.

Once more James the Apostle warns that the matter requires a quick, practical execution or immediate response to the word's dictates to the conscience after which the miracle is achieved meaning "he shall be blessed in his doing." This means that he will immediately feel a terrific joy when he reaps the fruit of his toil and discovers that the power of the gospel has entered his being and is actively directing him.

5 – The Apostle James thus reaches a very precise and sensitive conclusion that is: "Faith without works is dead" (Jam 2:20 NKJV). Only at this point on the basis of this verse does it become clear and we understand James the Apostle's deep meaning of 'work' being the sure proof that not only has man accepted the gospel but also all the items of faith in earnest and in practice, having not been a mere hearer of the word, deceiving himself and others, but fulfilling what he heard and received of the gospel and creed in a practical manner through his conduct. In that way he proves to himself and to others that he has become a true believer.

6 – "Thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed (i.e. the gospel)" (Rom 6:17).

The Apostle Paul here explains with great precision the source of liberty and being freed from the power of sin. He defines it with unequivocal words: obedience from the heart to the word of God. Obedience from the heart means belief and immediate response. This is in fact the absolute confirmation of the power of God's word to untie the shackles of will, mind and conduct from the power of sin.

7 – "I give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him with all speech and all knowledge – even as the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you" (1 Cor 1:4-6).

Here the Apostle Paul wakens our minds to note that the only way to richness in Christ is through the wealth of the word, meaning the gospel. As much as we are rich in the word we become rich in Christ. Richness in the word is not by learning and accurately repeating it but through earning its promises in our lives. He who is rich in the gospel word is he



who has gained its power and used it in his life thus increasing the depth of his life in Christ.

Then the Apostle Paul points once more to the relationship between the degree of richness in Christ by mentioning: “in every way you were enriched” and the amount of riches in the word which he expressed as: “all speech and all knowledge.” This means that according to the amount we acquire from every word of the gospel, meaning all the commandments of the Lord and knowledge of all His words practicing them in our lives, we will increase in the richness in Christ in everything. In other words in every thing concerning Christ Himself, i.e. His characteristics, glories, love and all mysteries.

This means that we are required to concentrate on every word, every commandment, every verse, and every teaching of the gospel, because the connection between them is close. In uniting them all together man gains more light, and depth increasing the facility to carry them out, and adding to his conduct the characteristics of Christian perfection. This means that richness in Christ is totally subject to the implementation of the profoundness and richness of the gospel.

It is of great importance to comment on the meaning of this great truth, that engagement, profoundness, and concentration on the gospel do not add to man’s fatigue or form an extra load and exhaust the mind, neither do they complicate man’s conduct as he might logically believe. It is completely to the contrary: more of the gospel with more profoundness, study, and vigilance, with added implementation and practice increases the easiness of life and the enlightenment of the mind.

8 – “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col 3:16).

Here the word reaches the point of a companionship, because dwelling in the theological evangelical concept of dwelling is that of a continuous advent and existence, so that man becomes the companion of the living word. The Apostle Paul gives us here an evangelical experience of the highest level, as the gospel becomes the participating power in every act and work. It then raises us to the richness of the level of a perfect life with the living word. This shows the satiation, sufficiency, and total dependency on the power of the gospel for us not to feel any need whatsoever. Through the word as the giving source in every situation we have dispensed with any worldly need and requirement.

Paul the Apostle teaches and had previously said that richness in the word directly means richness in Christ Himself and everything pertaining to Christ. Richness in Christ liberates man from every need.



Thus we deduce the powerful extent of concentration Christ and the Apostles have set on the living word, i.e. the gospel, as the source to change our conduct, renew the mind, liberate us from sin, liberate the spirit and accept the mystery of the new Christian life with all its amenities. Because the power of life and spirit existing in the active living word of God is in truth the direct source to gain aptitudes and new facilities that did not exist but were given to us through the mystery of the new birth, being our right that cannot be obtained through any other means.

The second factor: Grace as an assistant agent to the word:

In truth there still exists a chasm between the active living word and our bad suspecting minds that are hindered by painful experiences. It has therefore become actually necessary to have an intermediary that is reconciling, meek, and understands our ignorance overlooking our narrow-mindedness, to mediate between the word and our minds. Herein appears the grace of God to help, conciliate and enlighten. We must first get to know the meaning of the grace. Grace means the free power of God offered to us through the Holy Spirit or directly through Christ. Christ is therefore Himself the grace, and the Holy Spirit, Itself, is the grace when it, itself, works in us.

We must avow and mention the number of times, in our experience, we were puzzled by the word of God, perplexed, not understanding nor feeling the Divine proposed intention within it. How many times have we wept and on how many occasions have we spent time in silence when suddenly an inner voice emerged very clearly explaining the meaning and leading us to the intention, all of which was in accordance to the Spirit's and Christ's appraisal to the aptness of our spiritual stature, and suited to our position or hour's need. Thus the grace takes from the richness of the word and distributes it with extreme accuracy wisely, and simply according to our need as St. Paul the Apostle with authority says: "...according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us. For he has made known to us in wisdom and insight the mystery of his will" (Eph 1:7-9). Of course this is based on Christ's previous proclamation concerning the work of the Holy Spirit in our minds when He said: "He will teach you all things", "He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you", "bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you", "you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you" (John 14 and 16 NKJV).

St Peter the Apostle reiterates this and strictly emphasizes it, realizing the benefit we will gain from the entrance of the grace into our minds, and our intellectual and emotional reading and contemplation of the gospel:



“Therefore gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:13).

Here Peter the Apostle imagines how a Christian must gird his mind when he begins to read and understand, as a man girds his waist when he sets to accomplish an important work. “Gird up your minds” supposing “soberness” or “wakefulness” i.e. complete attention when man examines all the matters concerning the revelation of Christ, meaning recognizing and knowing Him. This is made clearer when we read the previous verses as follows:

“The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired (Note the effort the prophets made in order to understand the mysteries of God through the Holy Books) about this salvation...It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things which have now been announced to you by those who preached the good news to you through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things in which angels long to look” (1 Pet 1:10, 12).

After that, it is clear here why Peter the apostle requires us to gird our minds, wake-up, and hold on to the grace firmly when reading or listening to the gospel. Because Peter reminds us that these matters were especially written for us whether in the Old or New Testament, and that it was determined by a definite promise that the grace would serve us in such. It is a special service “the grace that was to be yours” to open our minds and supply us with the power of the Holy Spirit to obtain our complete salvation, and realize the mysteries of Christ that are ours and in which the angels long to look.

The Apostle Peter here emphasizes the factor of the grace to the greatest degree knowing that there is no way for us to obtain the power of the work of salvation in us and the revelation of the mystery of Christ in our lives except through the grace: “Set your heart fully upon the grace” (1 Pet 1:13).

To hope means the total dependence to the direction of grace and holding on to its work firmly and completely in the same way a blind man holds on to the hand of the seeing, or in better words in the way Timaeus’ son held on to Christ’s fingers that touched his eyes and made him see. The word ‘fully’ here means that grace is totally able to complete its work in us and is just waiting for us to set our hearts on it.





HEAVENLY BANQUET AND TABLE OF THE MESSIAH



B-In the New Testament (4)

By: Rodolph Yanney, M.D.

UNION OF THE BRIDEGROOM AND THE BRIDE

This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. (Eph. 5: 32)

On Earth there is nothing higher or greater or more holy than the Liturgy; it is the marriage feast of the Lamb, the marriage feast of the King's Son. In it, every believing soul becomes the bride of the Son of God St. John of Kronstadt

O sweetest Lord Jesus, what great sweetness has a devout soul that feasts with Thee in Thy banquet, where there is no other meat set before her to be eaten but Thyself, her only beloved, and most to be desired, above all the desires of her heart. And to me indeed it would be delightful to pour out tears in Thy presence, with the whole affection of my heart, and like the devout Magdalene to wash Thy feet with my tears (Luke 7: 38) Imitation of Christ' 4: 11: 1

The Holy Kiss

The Song of Songs starts with the words of the Bride:

"O that you would kiss me with the kisses of your mouth! For your love is better than wine, Your anointing oils are fragrant, your name is oil poured out; therefore the maidens love you. Draw me after you, let us make haste. The king has brought me into his chambers. We will exult and rejoice in you; we will extol your love more than wine; rightly do they love you." (Song of Solomon 1: 2--4).

In these verses, as well as in the rest of this OT book and in the Parable of the Ten Virgins, one observes the confusion between the singular and the plural senses even in the same verse. The heavenly Bridegroom treats each single soul separately. He calls her 'My dove, my perfect one, is only one, the darling of her mother, flawless to her that bore her' (Song 6: 9). However, this does not change the fact that the whole Church, visible and triumphant, is the Bride of Christ. This relationship is evident in the spiritual life of each member in the Church, from the moment of his first meeting with Christ, and his immersion in the baptismal pool, till the moment of meeting with him in the last day.



In their commentaries on the Song of Songs, the Church Fathers have seen that the ‘kisses’ are different aspects of the relationship between each soul and Christ. They are evident in the silent Prayer of the heart, meditation on the word of God, as well as in the reception of the Lord’s Body and Blood in the Eucharist. On the other hand, the Lord’s kisses are reflected in the life of service when one sacrifices himself for those whom he loves; for the brethren of the Lord—the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, and those who are imprisoned, physically or spiritually. In all these different aspects, the single believer never acts apart from the one Body of the Church, the Body of Christ. This is reflected in the rite, common in all the Church Sacraments that are corporate actions and should be performed in public, although the work of the Holy Spirit in them is consummated in each individual separately.

It is difficult to describe what really happens at the time of Communion. We have to hear the witness of the early Church Fathers and Martyrs:

*St. Perpetua, who died as a martyr in Carthage at the beginning of the third century, describes in her diary what she saw in a vision a few days before her death: by being thrown to the wild beasts:

“I beheld a ladder of bronze, marvelously great, reaching up to heaven; and it was arrow, And I went up... and I saw a very great space of garden, and in the midst a man sitting, white-headed, in shepherd’s clothing, tall milking his sheep; and standing around in white were many thousands. And he raised his head and beheld me and said to me’: Welcome, child’. And he cried to me, and from the curd he had from the milk he gave me as it were a morsel; and I took it with joined hands and ate it up; and all that stood around said, Amen. And at the sound of that word I awoke, yet eating I know not what of sweet”¹

*On the Epitaph of Abercius Bishop of Hierapolis, Phrygia (180-200), is written,

“I am a disciple of the chaste shepherd, who feeds his sheep on the mountains and in the Fields...Everywhere faith led the way, and everywhere set food before me – fish from the fountain. Mighty and pure, which the chaste Virgin caught, And gave then to friends to eat,

Having good wine, giving mixed wine with bread...

May everyone who is in accord with this and who understands this pray for Abercius.²

¹ Inter=Nicine Fathers: *The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicia*

² Jyrgens: *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, vol. 1, p 78.



St, Cyril of Jerusalem describes in detail how the newly-baptized should approach the Divine Mysteries:

Approaching the Eucharist

“In approaching come not with thy wrists extended, or thy Fingers spread; but make thy left hand a throne for the fight, as for that which is to receive a King. And having hollowed thy palm, receive the Body of Christ, saying over it, Amen. So then after having carefully hollowed your eyes by the touch of the Holy Body, partake of it; giving heed lest thou lose any portion; for whatever thou lovest, is evidently a loss to thee as it were from one of your own members. For tell me, if any one gave thee grains of gold, wouldest thou not hold them with all carefulness, being on thy guard against losing any of them, and suffering loss? Wilt thou not then much more carefully keep watch, that not a crumb fall from thee of what is more precious than gold and precious stones?

“Then after thou hast partaken of the Body of Christ, draw near also to the Cup of His Blood; not stretching forth your hands, but bending, and saying with an air of worship and reverence, Amen, hallow thyself by partaking also of the Blood of Christ. And while the moisture is still upon thy lips, touch it with your hands, and hallow your eyes and brow and the other organs of sense. Then wait for the prayer, and give thanks unto God, who hath accounted thee worthy of so great mysteries”³.

Graces and Blessings of the Eucharist

There are two dimensions of the spiritual life, which our Lord described when he reduced the whole Law to two commandments, love of God and love of one's neighbor. The upward direction is one's relation to God and is centered in the heart⁴, which is the only temple of God in the New Testament. (Acts 7: 48, 1 Cor. 3: 16). It reaches its climax in the contemplative life. The horizontal dimension is one's relation to the society and it appears in the life of work and service. Any spiritual life cannot be restricted to one dimension only. St. Paul of Thebes, who lived ninety years in the wilderness by himself, without seeing anybody, did not forget his responsibility towards the whole society. His prayers were destructive to paganism and helped Pope Athanasius in his fight against Arians. The robe of Athanasius that covered the body of St. Paul in his tomb was a constant plead for his

³ Sr. Cyril of Jerusalem: *on the Mysteries*. 5: 21, 22 (NPN, vol. VII)

⁴ Bishop Gregory (Coptic bishop for higher theological studies): *Spiritual Values in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist* (in Arabic), Cairo, 1966. p. 92.



prayers which even death could never stand in their way to help the Church and bring the exiled Pope safely to his see.

The Eucharist is the center of God's work in the Church, and even in the whole world since it is the Bread of God that is broken and his Body that is sacrificed for the life of the whole world, and his blood that is shed for many (John 6: 51, Matt. 26-28). It cannot be offered without both the vertical dimension, where God sits through his Holy Spirit in every heart, and where each individual becomes a member in the Body of Christ, who sits on the right hand of God the Father. Without this vertical dimension that binds heaven and earth there is no real Church. The churches become social gatherings that perform cultural, welfare, and political or other activities. They do not seek the Kingdom of God and its justice

The Eucharist is the marriage feast of each soul as well as that of the whole Church. Individuals receive the blessings of the Eucharist as members in the Body of Christ,

*He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. "" He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. (John 6: 54, 55)

I *am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15: 5).

“Without this union, the believer cannot produce the fruits of the Holy Spirit. But he, who receives the Sacrament regularly and worthily, will have Christ dwelling, as a king in his heart. He drives away all his enemies and manifests himself to him (John 14: 21).) He gradually reveals to him the light of his glory and divinity to the degree that his inner eye can tolerate. With frequent participation in the Eucharist, the human heart glows with a bright light that is sometimes reflected on his face. However, the inner light is enough to change him into a celestial being whose eye is always pure and his thoughts holy. The light that he has erupted inside him has made him partaker of the divine nature”⁵

To be continued



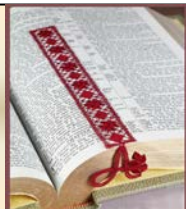
⁵ Translated from *The Spiritual Values in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist* (in Arabic) by the late Bishop Gregory who was ordained for Research and Theological Studies. In the Coptic Orthodox Church.



The Bible

And Ancient Tradition

Part J



Biblical Studies and commentaries in Greek, Syriac, Arabic, Armenian and Slavonic continued to exist from the days of the great fathers of the church through the Middle ages up to the present days.

The fathers, since Origen of Alexandria wrote his commentaries, draw on the techniques of the Greek 'Grammaticus', which was employed in Alexandria to establish and explain Classical works of the great writers (R. E. Heine, 'Stoic Logic as Handmaid to Exegesis and Theology in Origen's Commentary on the Gospel of John' JTS 44, 1993, 90-117). Thus to establish a good reading of the text by comparing textual variations was introduced as early as the beginning of the third century. Geography of Palestine and the etymology of the words were used to give more accurate meaning of words and names. This has continued throughout the history of both Eastern Churches.

The Common Features: It is beyond the scope of this article to provide the reader of a summary of a heritage which expands over 1400 years or even to summarize the various schools of theology which assume the various ways of understanding the Bible in Eastern context. What concern us here are the basic features which may be regarded as common among the Biblical scholars of the Eastern Churches. The common features can be summarized in the following way:

A. The Bible and Worship

Christian history did not start with theological controversies but with worship. The separation between the church and the synagogue came as a result of the new forms of worship namely baptism and the Lord's supper; both sacraments contained the seeds of future creeds. Whatever was the complicated history of the development of either sacrament, what is clear from the outline of both in the NT and later on is enough to point to the cause of the separation between the church and the synagogue. With the coming of the gentiles to join the new movement, confession of faith became a necessity. The confession that Jesus is Lord was the major element, which brought a new attitude to the OT and a different way of understanding the OT by the new members. This is reflected in the book of Acts, the Gospel of John, Romans, Galatians, and



later on in the Dialogue with Trypho and other related documents of the second and the third centuries. The divinity of Jesus, his resurrection and the acceptance of Gentiles in the new faith remained throughout the period of the formation of the great doctrines of the churches (325-415) the key issues which changed the understanding of the OT and contributed to the formation of the NT Canon.

Christ is the key to the scriptures: Whatever we can say about the origin and the influence of Jewish prayers on the prayers of the new movement, it is apparent from the oldest collection of the prayers of the Didache and later liturgical collections such as the Apostolic Tradition, that the Christian teaching is centered on the Person of Jesus. This shaped the new prayers and reflects the awareness of the new communities that they are now related to God the Father of Jesus Christ in a new way that demands a different way of understanding the OT. This has made all the difference between those who recognize Jesus as the Messiah and see in him the fulfillment of the OT divine promises and prophecies like Justin Martyr and others who refused to accept Jesus Messiah-ship. The debate is centered on the significance of the events or the Life of Jesus as the Key, which unlocks the meaning of the words of OT. This was expressed in worship, which made all the difference and inspired ancient Christians to read the OT differently and even to decide later on what should be included in the NT Canon. The debate between Justin and Trypho is not centered on the meaning of words in a text, but **on the meanings of words and texts in the light of the events of the life, teaching death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.** This basic idea is must be realized as we read the old documents of the first centuries especial those, which are related to the Christian Jewish dialogue. In other words we do not encounter a collection of proof texts, which prove this or that of the Christian teaching, but we read a Christian reflection on the Old Testament, which is guided and seen in the light of the life of Jesus as the Messiah. This does not weaken or undermined the New Testament but points to more than basic question among them is the primary one, how did ancient Christians read and understood the Bible. Truth, for early Christians was not an idea but the Son of God Incarnate i.e. the person of Jesus Christ. Thus to the personal understanding and to the personal relationship with the person of Jesus, words and texts must be understood. The reinterpretation of the Old Oracles is desirable and comes as a necessity which is determined by the New Revelation which its Truth is not the Law or the prophetic words but the person of Jesus Christ. In other words it was not by comparing this text with that text that



truth is revealed but by reading the text in the light of the life of Jesus that the words are understood differently. The dialogue between Christ and the two disciples on the road to Emmus in Luke, which is given in a summary, reveals the liturgical origin of the whole passage. Those who have faith and can discern the new reality in the shadows of the old Oracles can see Jesus in Moses and the prophetic books. The new reality is the person of Jesus himself.

Harmonizing the Four Gospels: Thus we can see baptism in the early practice and in the Lord's Supper the centrality of the person over the words and oracles. The meanings of any text can be determined by the events. The best example of what we say is in the writings of Origen. In his commentary on the Gospel of John book 10, he calls our attention to the discrepancy between John and the Synoptic Gospels. 'If the discrepancy between the Gospels is not solved, we must give up our trust in the Gospels, as being true and written by a divine spirit, or as records worthy of credence, for both these characters are held to belong to these works. Those who accept the four Gospels, and who do not consider that their apparent discrepancy is to be solved analogically, will have to clear up the difficulty, raised above, about the forty days of the temptation, a period for which no room can be found in any way in John's narrative; and they will also have to tell us when it was that the Lord came to Capernaum. If it was after the six days of the period of His baptism, the sixth being that of the marriage at Cans of Galilee, then it is clear that the temptation never took place, and that He never was at Nazareth, and that John was not yet delivered up. Now, after Capernaum, where He abode not many days, the Passovers of the Jews was at hand, and He went up to Jerusalem, where He cast the sheep and oxen out of the temple, and poured out the small change of the bankers. In Jerusalem, too, it appears that Nicodemus, the ruler and Pharisee, first came to Him by night, and heard what we may read in the Gospel. "After these things, Jesus came, and His disciples, into the land of Judea, and there He baptized, at the same time at which John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there were many waters there, and they came and were baptized; for John was not yet cast into prison." There are no words more clear than these words which reveal the difficulty of harmonizing the Four Gospels. Why this was not followed up by other generations who persuade the same questions? Origen himself did not doubt the historicity of the Gospels. He was the first one to point to the 'spiritual meaning of the events or the spiritual truth'. He says, 'There are many other points on which the careful student of the Gospels will find that their narratives



do not agree; and these we shall place before the reader, according to our power, as they occur. The student, staggered at the consideration of these things, will either renounce the attempt to find all the Gospels true, and not venturing to conclude that all our information about our Lord is untrustworthy, will choose at random one of them to be his guide; or he will accept the four, and will consider that their truth is not to be sought for in the outward and material letter.

We must, however, try to obtain some notion of the intention of the Evangelists in such matters, and we direct ourselves to this. Suppose there are several men who, by the spirit, see God, and know His words addressed to His saints, and His presence which He bestows to them, appearing to them at chosen times for their advancement. There are several such men, and they are in different places, and the benefits they receive from above vary in shape and character. And let these men report, each of them separately, what he sees in spirit about God and His words, and His appearances to His saints, so that one of them speaks of God's appearances and words and acts to one righteous man in such a place, and another about other oracles and great works of the Lord, and a third of something else than what the former two have dealt with. And let there be a fourth, doing with regard to some particular matter something of the same kind as these three. And let the four agree with each other about something the Spirit has suggested to them all, and let them also make brief reports of other matters besides that one; then their narratives will fall out something on this wise: God appeared to such a one at such a time and in such a place, and did to him thus and thus; as if He had appeared to him in such a form, and had led him by the hand to such a place, and then done to him thus and thus. The second will report that God appeared at the very time of the fore said occurrences, in a certain town, to a person who is named, a second person, and in a place far removed from that of the former account, and he will report a different set of words spoken at the same time to this second person. And let the same be supposed to be the case with the third and with the fourth. And let them, as we said, agree, these witnesses who report true things about God, and about His benefits conferred on certain men, let them agree with each other in some of the narratives they report. He, then, who takes the writings of these men for history, or for a representation of real things by a historical image, and who supposes God to be within certain limits in space, and to be unable to present to several persons in different places several visions of Himself at the same time, or to be making several speeches at the same moment, he will deem it impossible that our four



writers are all speaking truth. To him it is impossible that God, who is in certain limits in space, could at the same set time be saying one thing to one man and another to another, and that He should be doing a thing and the opposite thing as well, and, to put it bluntly, that He should be both sitting and standing, should one of the writers represent Him as standing at the time, and making a certain speech in such a place to such a man, while a second writer speaks of Him as sitting.

The Rule of Faith: The Evangelists changed ‘the historical account to give a spiritual truth, ‘They have related what happened in this place as though it happened in another, or what happened at this time as though it happened at another time, and they composed what is reported in this manner with certain degree of distortion’. According to Origen, the spiritual truth subjects the historical truth’ (Comm On Jn 10,19-20). This truth is the faith of the church as was embodied in what was called at that time the Rule of Faith. and later the creed.

The Rule of Faith, which was the oldest form of confession adopted in most of the ancient Christian communities, preceded the Canon of the NT. In fact a close examination of the debate with Gnosticism may reveal to us that the Rule of Faith itself was responsible for two things:

1. The exclusion of certain books and defining the understanding the Canon. It is the faith in the Creator God, of the OT, who is also the Redeemer and the Father of Jesus Christ, as is declared in the Rule of faith that retained the OT books, confirmed the reading of the selected NT and excluded other books such as the Nag Hammadi collection.

2. Even later on, the whole debate with Aryanism was about the confession of Faith not about the OT or the NT texts. Modern studies on Aryanism were able, after a long period of fascination with the biblical arguments exchanged between the two sides, to discover that soterology was the guiding hermeneutical principle, which divided Orthodoxy from Aryanism. In other words the meaning of Biblical texts is defined by the practice of the church which in turn is defined by the confession of faith. This will remain the same during the debate with Nestorianism. The words of the Creed of Nicea 325 played the hermeneutical principle, the understanding and the approach to the Biblical texts and to the Christological questions which were raised at that time.

Time and space do not allow us to unfold the fact that the Bible did not give rise to Church not to Israel because both had a similar starting point, the events of their relationship with God. The Bible is certainly what gave birth to the Reformation but not to the ancient church in both



East and West. In other words the Bible was read in the light of the relationship between God and the people of God.

Faith preceded the formation of the Canon. This was altered during and after the Reformation because the Reformation had its birth within the church as a movement aiming at renewal and guided by reading the Bible differently from the Church of the Middle Ages. Thus the various disciplines of Biblical Studies which came to existence in the West are in harmony with the origin and the development of Reformed Christianity. The coming of the Catholic Church to this arena and in response to the challenge of the Reformation is also an integral part of common European culture and the historical relationship of both Catholic and Reformed Churches.

The Eastern Churches seem not to be fascinated by the late Western tools and schools of the interpretation of the words and the texts of the Bible. Even in Greece, Russia and the established Orthodox Theological Institutes in France and the USA, Orthodox theologians remain committed to the above guiding principles, the Creed and the practice of the church. Worship remains the essential school of Biblical interpretation. The Bible must be explained according to the Creed, the liturgical life of the church and the Monastic ideal of Christian Holiness.

In the works of Orthodox theologians, the Bible is understood as part of the life of the church. Holiness and Christian life in its Orthodox monastic forms, is the goal of all interpretation and speculations.

St Athanasius of Alexandria gives a fairly defined name of this approach to the Bible, 'The Ecclesiastical Meaning', of the word of God must be according to 'the Scope of Salvation' (See, Contra Gent 6, Contra Arianos, 1:44 and 3:27, 28,29, 35, Serapion 4:15). Arianism has put on the language of the Scripture as a garment to deceive the foolish, (Contra Arianos1: 1-2) but the Arian interpretation is 'foreign' because it is misinterpretation according to the 'private sense' (Contra Arianos 1:37). The Ecclesiastical sense of the words of the Bible is in the Scope of Salvation, which is the unity of the Godhead, the divinity of the Son, his death, and resurrection. This is what Athanasius called 'the biblical 'Double account of the Saviour' (Contra Arianos 3:29) the first which speaks of his divinity and the second which speaks of his humanity, 'This is the Scope of salvation which is to be found throughout inspired Scripture' (Ibid). In other words the Bible must be understood according to the confession of faith and the message of salvation.

Modern scholars very often express their surprise that all the fathers quote John and Paul in the same line. The NT like the OT is one book,



which must be read according to the faith of the church not according to the writer. Although some of the fathers like Origen was aware that some writers have a particular words and style, nevertheless they all are witness to the faith. Patristic writings contain the seeds of Biblical Criticism, but they lay there undeveloped because the gaol of Christian life is 'Deification' or 'Participation in the divine Nature'.

In this sense it is accurate to say that the special place of the Bible in ancient Christianity was and is in Eastern Christianity a witness to the faith of the church as declared and experienced in worship. This experience is what gave the books its name the New Testament. The Eastern fathers never used the expression the Authority of the Scriptures. St Augustine and the Latin fathers used it in a limited way and became common expression with the arrival of St Thomas Aquinas. The differences between 'Authority and Witness' are important to notice. The witness of the Bible to the faith of the church does not come from the words or the texts but from the events and their interpretation. This interpretation is to be discovered in worship and specially in the experience salvation.

It was Baptism, the Eucharist, and other forms of worship that shaped the attitude to the Bible in early Christian worship. The Word of God was read in the gatherings of the church especially on the Lord's day and this remained the obvious attitude to the word of God till the Fourth Century when the Homilies of the fathers were written and Commentaries were composed very often to explain the community 's participation in the life of Christ. The discourses of the fathers to the catechumens on baptism such as those of Cyril of Jerusalem or John Chrysostom are full of biblical images that may shock the readers. Most of the biblical texts were selected for instruction and for preparing the candidates for baptism. The fathers do not apologise for the way they explain the biblical texts because the bible is the main book for instruction. It has the seeds of all the teaching of the church. It is the church's first book and its proper use was never questioned.

G. B.

To be continued





The Millennium

In The Bible

The word "Thousand Years (**Millennium**)" only appears in the Bible in the Book of Revelation Chapter 20, where It is mentioned 6 times.

The Book of Revelation contains seven visions and cycles of revelations. Each of the seven visions is a full view of the Redemption of Christ, but each one emphasizing different aspects of His redemption. Chapters 1-2-3 of Revelation include the first vision, while chapters 20-21-22 are the 7th and final vision of John. Chapter 20 does not follow in time after chapter 1 because both of the 1st vision and the 7th vision are revealing the same incidents but viewed from different perspectives.

Chapter 20 of Revelation:

It is the only place in the bible where the "Thousand Years" has been mentioned, revealing the following 7 facts regarding it:

1- "Satan is bound for 1,000 years" (20:1-3):

This "binding of Satan" already **occurred at Calvary**, as the Bible says: *"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."* (Luk. 10:18)... *"And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it"* (Colos. 2: 14-15)... *"For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment"* (2 Peter 2:4).

The "1,000 years" is a symbolic number representing big number of years, started with the death of the Lord and shall continue to the end of the world. *"After that he must be loosed for a little while"* (20:3).

The Millennium is not to come, we are on it right now.

2- The Millennium of the saved (20:4-5):

Those who already died in the Lord are with Christ; they reign with Christ for these thousand years. The "good thief" of Luk.23: 43 is not alone at Paradise with Jesus! Surely with Him are all those who died in Christ, like Peter, and Paul, and all saints who believe in Christ.

3- First & Second Death (20:6):

The "first death" is by sin; and the "first Resurrection" is with Christ, *"If then **you were raised with Christ**, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God"* (Col. 3:1). The "second death" is Hell. For those who died in Christ, the second death has no



power on them, *"I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.*" (Matt 22:32)

4- Release of Satan after the thousand years (20:7-8):

Satan will come out to deceive the nations, *"And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations which are at the four corners of the earth, that is, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea."* These are the years of Great Tribulation with the Abomination of Desolation. (Matt.24: 15& 21). Gog and Magog are representing the Communist Movement and its hate to Christianity.

5-The camp of the saints and the beloved city (20:9):

"And they marched up over the broad earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city and fire came down from heaven, and consumed them": The Camp Of The Saints And The Beloved City represent the Church of Christ, which is surrounded by the enemies who *"marched up over the broad earth, (The World Wars)"*

6- Satan thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur (20:10):

The lake of fire is the eternal final place for Satan, the beast, and the false prophet.

7-The Final Judgment (20:11-14):

It is the Final Judgment of Matt.25:31-46... with the same measures. *"And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done"...* here is mentioned again the "second death": The lake of fire, Hell.

Your Millennium Is Now:

The Millennium is not to come, we are on it right now. If you live in Christ, in His Church, and Christ lives in you, you are in the glorious Millennium right now, with no fear of any one or anything, because Jesus lives in you, and He is more powerful than the World. *"Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness... For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord "* (Ro 6: 16-23)

F.Youssef





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